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Washington State Board of Health
Dr. Kim Marie Thorburn, Chair
Health Officer - Spokane
Regional Health District
1101 West College Avenue
Spokane, WA 99201

Dear Dr. Thorburn:

I have read in the *Washington State Board of Health 2005 Five-Year Plan*, adopted January 11, 2006, that the board's mission is to provide statewide leadership in advancing policies that protect and improve the public's health.

On February 23, 2006, four men were arrested in Brooklyn, Kings County, New York and charged with stealing tissue from corpses without consent and selling it to transplant companies for surgical procedures. (District Attorney's press release: http://www.brooklynnda.org/News/press_releases%202006.htm#008) The 122-count indictment charged Michael Mastromarino, Joseph Nicelli, Lee Crucetta and Christopher Aldorasi with falsifying documents, including death certificates, consent forms and medical records pertaining to more than one thousand corpses over the course of four years.

The human tissue was harvested by Mastromarino's company, Biotechnical Tissue Services, of Fort Lee, New Jersey, and was used, in unknown number of states and Canada, in dental implants, orthopedic reconstructions, surgical replacements and other procedures.

The harvested tissue was not tested for infectious disease. In some publicized cases, the elderly victims died from cancers of various types, including those that had metastasized to the bones. Neither the tissue nor the "donors" were tested for infectious diseases such as HIV-1, HIV-2 hepatitis B and C, and syphilis. They were not verified against the standard criteria for suitable organ donation. Ages of the deceased were routinely falsified, as were the causes of death. A corpse of 104 years of age was listed as 84 years, for example. An 82-year old victim of brain cancer and diabetes was listed as having died at 65 from a heart attack.

The story has been widely and locally reported in Texas, California, Maine, Indiana, Louisiana, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma, Florida, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Georgia, Iowa, Nebraska, Massachusetts and Vermont. There are known recipient-victims in all these states as well as Oregon. It has also aired on several national television news programs. The Seattle press carried only a few AP wire stories in late February.

Some of this tissue was implanted in patients in Washington State. To my knowledge, there has been no reporting or investigation in this state. The US Food and Drug Administration recalled the tissue and required all health care facilities to return unused tissue to the processing company for destruction. The FDA also *recommended*, but did not require, that health care providers notify all recipients of implanted illegal tissue. The Vermont Board of Health is providing additional oversight and interface with the FDA in that state.

I am writing to urge the Washington State Board of Health, in keeping with its mission statement, to provide leadership by:

- Investigating the distribution of illegal tissue in Washington State;
- Publicizing the distribution of illegal tissue and potential health risks;
- **Requiring** Washington health care providers to notify all recipients of suspect tissue;
- Keeping a registry of implant recipients in Washington State;
- Ensuring that all suspect tissue delivered to this state is accounted for;
- Advising the public in Washington State about possible remedies, such as periodic testing for certain infectious diseases;
- Representing and advocating for the citizens in Washington State by demanding full disclosure of the extent of distribution by the Food and Drug Administration;
- Representing and advocating for the citizens of Washington State by insisting the US Centers for Disease Control and the FDA promptly and fully report incidents of infection resulting from implants of illegal tissue;
- Advocating for stricter regulation of the tissue-transplant industry.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire and Washington State Secretary of Health Mary Selecky, because it is the job of government to do the things that we as individuals cannot do alone. However, I am appealing to you, as a board member and policy-maker, to steer the department in a direction that will protect the health of the citizens of this state.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jackie Szikszoy Ramels

cc: Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire
Washington State Secretary of Health Mary Selecky
Washington State Board of Health members